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ABSTRACT

The 1999 conference of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association (MWERA) was the second year the association allowed presenters to submit proposals over the World Wide Web. Enhancements to the on-line system since the 1998 conference allowed proposal reviewers to examine submissions and provide their comments on-line. Members of the program committee were also able to enter and edit session scheduling and other program information over the Web. Just under half of the conference's proposers used the on-line submission system, and just over half of those on-line submissions were also reviewed on-line. No statistical differences were found between those proposals made on-line versus those submitted on paper, or in terms of their reviews or rates of acceptance. There were statistically significant differences in the physical locations (places of author residence) and proposal submission dates according to submission format, with on-line submissions generally arriving 2 to 5 days before their paper equivalents. Program committee members used the on-line system to enter all program information and to schedule all sessions. In feedback, reviewers and program committee members praised the system, citing time savings and ease of use as primary benefits. (Author/SLD)

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Two Years of Electronic Submissions to a Regional Conference

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A paper presented at the 2000 Annual Meeting
of the
American Educational Research Association
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Abstract

The 1999 conference of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association (MWERA) was the second year of the association's allowing presenters to submit proposals over the World Wide Web. Enhancements to the on-line system since the 1998 conference allowed proposal reviewers to examine submissions and provide their comments on-line. Members of the program committee (Program Chair, Division Chair and Co-Chairs, and Associate Chairs) were also able to enter and edit session scheduling and other program information over the web. Just under half of the conference's proposers used the on-line submission system, and just over half of those on-line submissions were also reviewed on-line. No statistical differences were found between those proposals made on-line versus ones submitted on paper, or in terms of their reviews or rates of acceptable. There were statistically significant differences in the physical locations (states people reside in) and proposal submission dates, however, according to submission format, with on-line submission generally arriving two to five days before their paper counterparts. Program committee members used the on-line system to enter all program information and to schedule all sessions. Feedback from reviewers and program committee members praised the system, citing time savings and ease of use as it primary benefits. This experience demonstrates the benefits of a web-based proposal submission, review, and program planning system.

Two Years of Electronic Submissions to a Regional Conference

The Mid-Western Educational Research Association (MWERA), a regional affiliate of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), is in its third year of using the web for the planning of its annual conference. The basic web site (http://www.tierlab.ilstu.edu/MWERA) provides static program information (i.e., basic program details, host city information, and invited speaker profiles) to interested users. The web site was expanded for the 1998 conference to provide support for both traditional paper and on line submission of presentation proposals. An on line database allowed proposers to submit presentation proposals over the web, and to query the review and scheduling status of their submissions. Additions for the 1999 conference allowed reviewers to conduct an on line review of web submitted proposals, and for the program committee (Program Chair, Division Chairs and Co-Chairs, and other assistants) to complete the scheduling of program sessions (presenters, session chairs, and session discussants) over the web. This database provided the entire meeting program, including paper abstracts, in an on line search mechanism designed for locating both sessions, and individual presentations, of interest. It also served as a master merge source that was used to create the final program book (a special edition of the Mid-Western Educational Researcher), the Abstracts Book (a publication of all abstracts presented at the conference), the Program Addendum handout (listing post-publication program changes), and focused conference attendee feedback forms for specific sessions.

Creating this web site took quite a bit of work, and maintaining its database functionality requires an on-going commitment. Logically, such effort should only be expended if the options (basic web information, electronic submission and review, and program scheduling) were useful to the association's membership. Thus, several questions were asked:

(1) Did proposers for the MWERA-99 conference take advantage of the electronic submission option?
(2) Were there differences in the kinds of people who submitted electronically versus on paper?
(3) Were certain kinds of presentation types, or certain divisions, more or less likely to receive proposals in a certain format?
(4) Was the method of submission related to when the presentation was submitted, or its eventual acceptance or rejection?
(5) How did these qualities of second year (1999 conference) submissions compare to the first year (1998 conference) when electronic submissions were used?
(6) Finally, how well did the on line review system work, and how did reviews conducted on line compare to those done in the traditional way?

Background

The Mid-Western Educational Research Association (MWERA) is an organization of scholars and practitioners, researchers and instructors, and educators from all levels and perspectives. Each years MWERA hosts a four-day conference where participants share research findings and opinions in a collegial atmosphere. Like most regional professional meetings, MWERA's annual conference provides a variety of presentation formats (traditional paper

presentation, roundtable/poster, symposium, workshop, and alternative format) interspersed with invited speakers, special events, and socials.

In the past individuals interested in presenting a paper at the annual meeting were required to submit their application on paper. The packet typically consisted of: six copies of the official submission proposal form, three copies of a 100 to 150 word abstract, six copies of a two to three page summary (three with author identification and three without), two 3 by 5 index cards with certain information, and four postage-paid, self addressed return envelopes. These materials were used by the Program Chair, Division Program Chairs (and Co-Chairs), and Associate Program Chairs for the proposal's blind peer-review, and the preparation of the meeting program and abstracts book.

The MWERA Board of Directors first decided to try allowing proposals to be submitted either on paper, in the traditional way, or over a World Wide Web site, for the 1998 conference. This process proved to be very successful (Hecht, 1999), although feedback from association members included a desire to have on-line review capabilities and some method for program planning personnel to prepare program scheduling on-line. This process was refined and expanded to include these features in time for the 1999 conference.

The Call for Proposals, circulated on paper and on the web site, provided information about both methods of submission, and interested parties were encouraged to try using the electronic submission alternative. Electronic submissions were enabled three months prior Call deadline. This deadline was eventually extended through June of that year.

Method

A web site was created (and tested in both Netscape Navigator 4.x and Internet Explorer 4.x) to be used as the primary means of proposal submission. This site consisted of both a public information area, giving general information about the association and the upcoming conference (see Figure 1), and a password-protected area, where proposal review and program planning would take place. These forms were all linked, via ODBC, to a Microsoft Access 97 (later Microsoft Access 2000) database, the result being that electronic submissions, reviews, and other scheduling decisions were entered directly and immediately into the appropriate fields in this database. The system allowed multiple, simultaneous users from multiple locations, without any restriction in terms of which users could be working on what parts of the system at one time. Microsoft's Active Serve Page (ASP) technology, using under Internet Information Server (IIS) version 4.0 on a Windows NT 4.0 server, served as the back-end support platform, with the actual pages written in a combination of standard HTML, Java, Jscript, and VBScript. This technology provided a straightforward and efficient means of entering and retrieving information between the database and the web browser.

The on line database contained all of the information submitted by each proposer, including: the principal presenter's name and address, the names and institutional affiliations of any co-presenters, the title of the proposed presentation, detailed information about the proposed presentation, and the proposal abstract and summary text (see Figure 2). Proposals submitted electronically were automatically entered into this database; those submitted on paper were typed

into the database (all items except for the longer summary text) by the Program Chair's staff. The system automatically recorded the date of initial proposal receipt, how the proposal was submitted (on paper or electronically), and whether or not the proposal was eventually accepted for presentation at the conference.

Once a proposal had been entered into the system the Program Chair and/or Division Chairs were able to assign specific reviewers to individual proposals. Only proposals submitted electronically were eligible to be reviewed on-line (the others having to be reviewed in the traditional manner); however, all Division Chairs were able to use the system to maintain their lists of reviewers, simplifying the task of crediting reviewers in the program later on. Once assigned, a reviewer could login to the system and review any or all of their assigned papers (see Figure 3). Division Chairs could then review proposal submissions, together with reviewers ratings and comments, to determine if the proposal should be placed on the conference program. Submissions were either accepted outright, rejected outright, or passed to the Program Chair for acceptance if space in the program permitted. Submitters could keep track on-line of their proposals throughout the entire review process, including receiving reviewer comments and scheduling information once the proposal had been accepted (see Figure 4).

After a decision had been made on a submission it could be placed into a session, according to the scheduling recommendations of the Division Chair and the final decision of the Program Chair. The Program Chair and/or Associate Program Chair(s) would use the on-line system to first enter information about the session to be scheduled (date, start and stop times, meeting room, type of session, session title, special notes, etc.). The Session Chair and Session Discussant would then be assigned to the session (in most cases this information had already been entered into the system by the Division Chair). Finally, the accepted paper would be assigned to the session (and, if the session was a roundtable/poster type of session, assigned a table and/or poster number). The system provided facilities for examining the program as it was being created from a number of different perspectives (e.g., by session, by date, by room, by presenter), as well as checking for presenter cross-scheduling (scheduling one presenter in two sessions at the same time). Creation of the final printed program occurred through a merge of the completed database with a Microsoft Word template, which was then double-checked for accuracy, spacing, and pagination before being sent to the printers (a similar process occurred for the production of the Abstract Book and the Program Addendum).

Selected fields, minus any personal identifying information, were extracted from the conference database in mid-July immediately following the finalization of the meeting's program. These data were transferred to SPSS for Windows (version 10) for analysis.

Results

A total of 219 proposals were submitted for the MWERA-99 conference: 115 (52.5%) on paper and 104 (47.5%) electronically. Although the majority of proposers still preferred the traditional paper method of submission, the number submitting on line had increased from the 1998 conference (from 85 or 44.1% of the total for that year). Table 1 summarizes these results.

Cross tabulations were run to see if differences existed between the on-paper proposers and the electronic proposers on a number of characteristic proposal elements. The first of these considered the division to which the proposal was submitted. As in the 1998 conference Division K received the largest number of proposals both on paper and electronically, while Division F received the fewest. There was not a statistically significant different between the rates of submission to the different division (chi-squared = 12.825, df = 10, p = .234). The desired format of presentation (paper, roundtable, symposium, workshop, or alternative session) was also examined. Traditional paper presentations were again the most desired format, from 65.3% of the total submissions (down from 72.5% the prior year), although there were not statistically significant difference related to method of submission (chi-squared = 9.267, df = 4, p = .055).

The status of the proposer, whether a member of MWERA or a student, was next examined. Although more MWERA members submitted proposals to MWERA-99 than non-members, the proportions who submitted on paper versus on line were not statistically significantly different. Approximately one-quarter of all submissions came from students, with students using the on line web submission in the same proportions as non-students.

Statistically significant findings were only discovered in two comparisons. The first examined proposals by state address of the principal presenter. MWERA-98 received proposals from principal presenters residing in 20 different states. Only electronic proposals (seven total) were received from individuals living in Georgia, Indiana, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee, while only on-paper proposals (seven total) were received from individuals in California, Maryland, Minnesota, and South Carolina. Proposals were received in both formats from the remaining states. This difference is statistically significant (chi-squared = 35.644, df = 19, p = .024).

The second statistically significant finding concerned the date the proposals were received. The first proposal (which was submitted on paper) was received on the 23rd of February, while the last proposal was received on the 12th of July. The number of on line proposals received increased steadily through April 19th (just past the first call date), then leveled off until the 28th of April and increasing again until early June. Fewer paper proposals, on the other hand, came in as early or as steadily, with most arriving very close to the original call date. This was a change from the prior year, where more on line proposals arrived very close the call date (see Figures 5 and 6). This might have been due to a change in the call date, moving it earlier in the year.

For the 1999 conference it was possible for on line submissions to be reviewed on line. Each Division Chair was given the option of whether he or she wanted to have that division's proposals reviewed on line, depending on the access and technical prowess of the reviewers. While a few divisions elected not to participate in on line reviews at all, many allowed at least some of their proposals to be reviewed on line. A total of 58 (of the 104, or 55.8%) on line submissions were reviewed in this way, with the remaining being reviewed using the traditional system. Thirty-four reviewers participated in the on line review process, reviewing between one and six papers each (the average being three papers reviewed per reviewer). No statistically significant difference was found in the acceptance rates of papers reviewed on paper versus on line, although anecdotal reports from several of the division chairs and reviewers described the

on line review process as much faster, easier, and less costly (both in time and money) than paper reviews. There were no reports of technical faults interfering with the review process.

Length of proposal titles (79.59 average characters on paper versus 75.46 average characters on line), length of proposal abstracts (807.39 average characters on paper versus 785.06 average characters on line), length of co-author information (40.7 average characters on paper versus 42.47 average characters on line), proposal descriptor(s) selected, and proposal acceptance rate (87% on paper versus 91.3% on line) were also compared. No other statistically significant differences were found.

Discussion

The experiences of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association 1999 Program Planning committee show that electronic submission and review is a viable means to receive proposals for a regional meeting. A large number of the MWERA-99 proposers chose to use the electronic proposal format, a method that saved meeting planners considerable time as these submissions' critical information did not have to be entered into the meeting database. This second year of on line submission demonstrated that the electronic submissions were essentially indistinguishable from those submitted on paper, while providing significant benefits to proposers and meeting planners.

An additional benefit to the program committee was evident at the production of the Program and Abstract Book. In prior years the information for these two items had to all be entered into a computer by program committee staff. This year the electronic submissions, which went directly into the database, reduced that amount of work significantly. Further, since the information was in a database (as opposed to a word processing file) it was very easily sort, selected, and merged into the necessary formats for the printed Program, Abstract Book, Addendum, and other printed materials. It is estimated that this alone saved almost four weeks of production effort by the program committee staff.

Unsolicited comments received from electronic proposers were uniformly positive and encouraging. Most indicated that they enjoyed being able to "cut-and-paste" from their word processor directly into a web form, not having to type cover sheets and index cards, and being able to use the web site to check on the status of their proposal. Only a few people experienced a difficulty in submitting electronically, and that was eventually tracked down to their use of an extremely old version of a web browser (one that did not support form processing completely) or unstable user-side Internet connection. Comments from paper proposers were also positive. Many reported having used the web site to check on the status of their proposals even though the original submission was made on paper.

Other state and regional organizations should be considering providing electronic proposal submissions to their membership. Its relative ease of implementation, time saving features, and power to provide additional on line information will make electronic submissions and databases more popular in the coming years. Program Chairs, and association Boards of Directors, should be reassured that proposal quality appears not to be affected, and the rates of submissions by different constituencies to different divisions are not affected.

References

Hecht, J. B. (1999). Electronic or paper? Comparing submissions to MWERA-98. Mid-Western Educational Researcher, 12(1), 28-30.

Table 1
Comparison of Submissions 1998 vs. 1999

	Submissions			
	Number		Percent	
Source	1998	1999	1998	1999
Paper	108	115	55.9%	52.5%
Web	85	104	44.1%	47.5%
Total	193	219	100.0%	100.0%

Figure 1.
MWERA(1999 Conference) Home Page

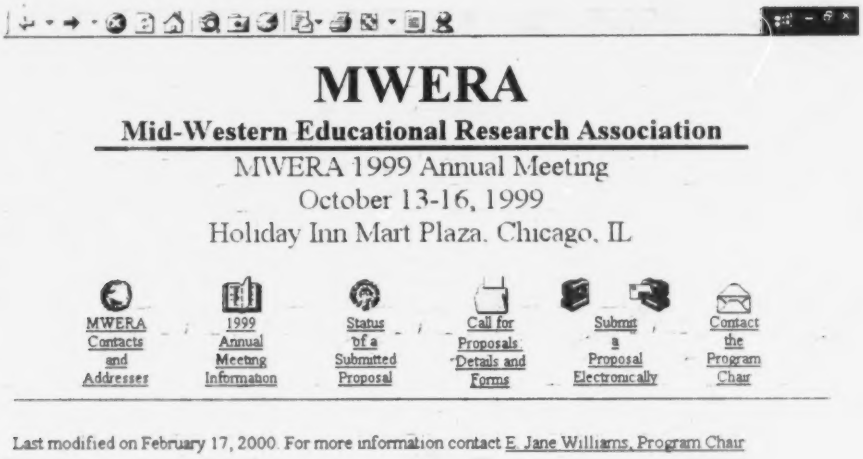
MWERA
Mid-Western Educational Research Association
MWERA 1999 Annual Meeting
October 13-16, 1999
Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, Chicago, IL
MWERA Contacts and Addresses
1999 Annual Meeting Information
Status of a Submitted Proposal
Call for Proposals: Details and Forms
Submit a Proposal Electronically
Contact the Program Chair
Last modified on February 17, 2000. For more information contact E. Jane Williams, Program Chair

Figure 2.
MWERA (1999 Conference) Proposal Submission page.

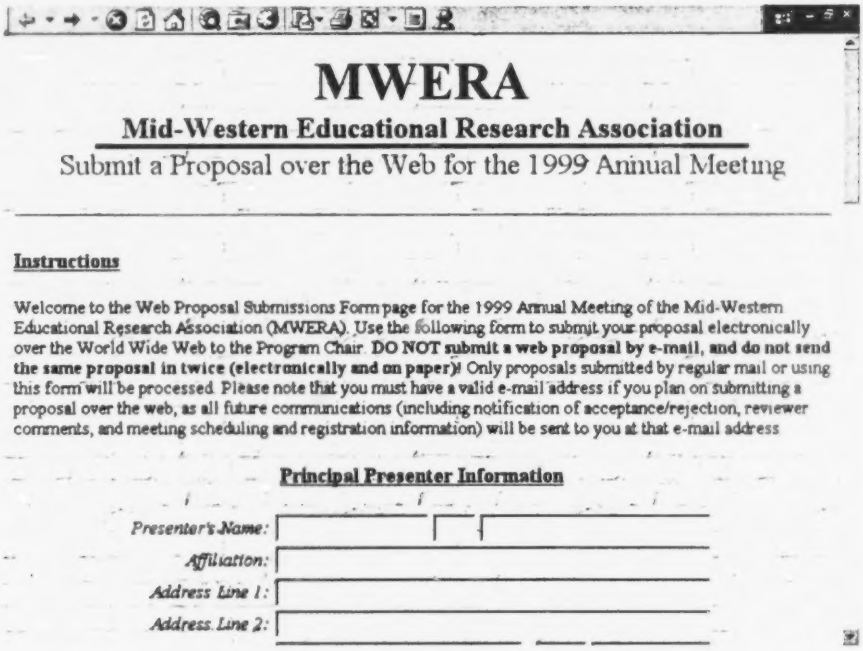
MWERA
Mid-Western Educational Research Association
Submit a Proposal over the Web for the 1999 Annual Meeting
Instructions
Welcome to the Web Proposal Submissions Form page for the 1999 Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association (MWERA). Use the following form to submit your proposal electronically over the World Wide Web to the Program Chair. DO NOT submit a web proposal by e-mail, and do not send the same proposal in twice (electronically and on paper)! Only proposals submitted by regular mail or using this form will be processed. Please note that you must have a valid e-mail address if you plan on submitting a proposal over the web, as all future communications (including notification of acceptance/rejection, reviewer comments, and meeting scheduling and registration information) will be sent to you at that e-mail address.
Principal Presenter Information
Presenter's Name:
Affiliation:
Address Line 1:
Address Line 2:

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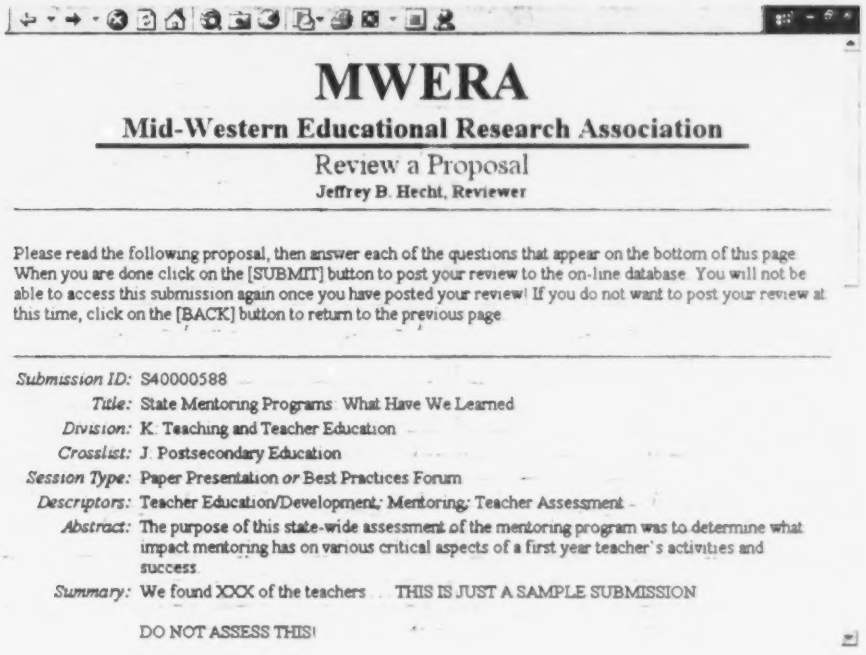
Figure 3.
MWERA (1999 Conference) Reviewer Comment Form



MWERA

Mid-Western Educational Research Association

Review a Proposal

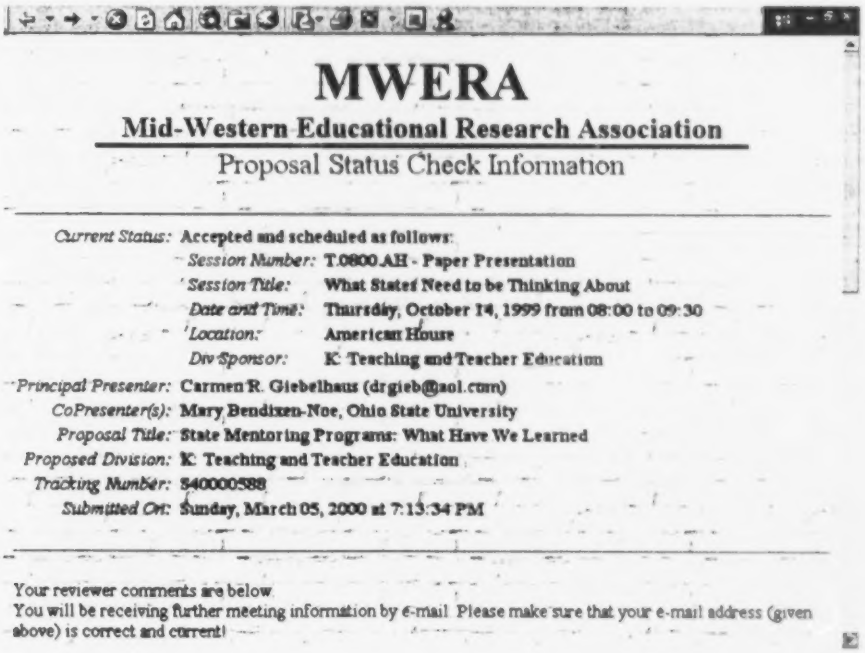
Jeffrey B. Hecht, Reviewer

Please read the following proposal, then answer each of the questions that appear on the bottom of this page. When you are done click on the [SUBMIT] button to post your review to the on-line database. You will not be able to access this submission again once you have posted your review! If you do not want to post your review at this time, click on the [BACK] button to return to the previous page.

Submission ID: S40000588
Title: State Mentoring Programs: What Have We Learned
Division: K. Teaching and Teacher Education
Crosslist: J. Postsecondary Education
Session Type: Paper Presentation *or* Best Practices Forum
Descriptors: Teacher Education/Development; Mentoring; Teacher Assessment
Abstract: The purpose of this state-wide assessment of the mentoring program was to determine what impact mentoring has on various critical aspects of a first year teacher's activities and success.
Summary: We found XXX of the teachers . . . THIS IS JUST A SAMPLE SUBMISSION

DO NOT ASSESS THIS!

Figure 4.
MWERA (1999 Conference) Proposer Status Form



MWERA

Mid-Western Educational Research Association

Proposal Status Check Information

Current Status: **Accepted and scheduled as follows:**
Session Number: **T.0800.AH - Paper Presentation**
Session Title: **What States Need to be Thinking About**
Date and Time: **Thursday, October 14, 1999 from 08:00 to 09:30**
Location: **American House**
Div Sponsor: **K. Teaching and Teacher Education**
Principal Presenter: **Carmen R. Giebelhaus (drgieb@aol.com)**
CoPresenter(s): **Mary Bendixen-Noe, Ohio State University**
Proposal Title: **State Mentoring Programs: What Have We Learned**
Proposed Division: **K. Teaching and Teacher Education**
Tracking Number: **S40000588**
Submitted On: **Sunday, March 05, 2000 at 7:13:34 PM**

Your reviewer comments are below.
You will be receiving further meeting information by e-mail. Please make sure that your e-mail address (given above) is correct and current!

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Figure 5.
Frequency of Submissions by Date and Submission Format for the 1998 conference.

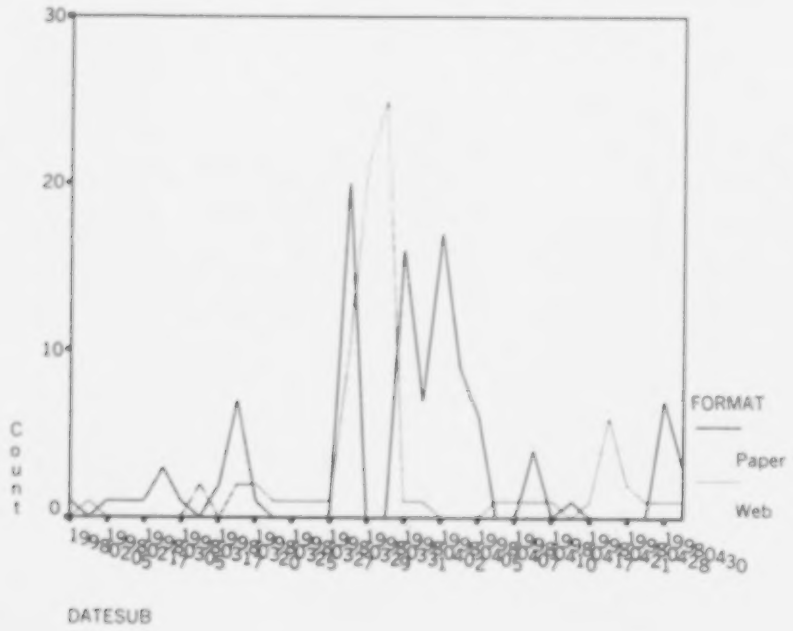
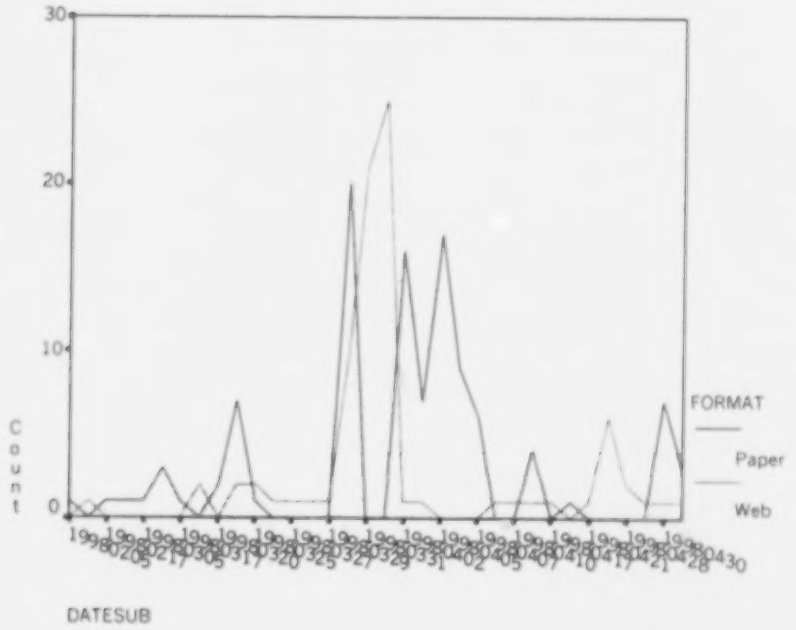


Figure 6.
Frequency of Submissions by Date and Submission Format for the 1999 conference.



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